

**Thomas Jefferson Health District
2009 H1N1 Influenza Update – 10/6/09**

Epidemiology

Influenza activity continues to increase.

- In the Thomas Jefferson Health District, several clusters of influenza-like illness have been reported by local schools and some have been confirmed to be caused by the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus.
- In Virginia, visits to doctors for influenza-like illness increased during the last reporting period. This level of influenza-like activity is very unusual for this time of year.
- In the U.S., hospitalization rates for laboratory-confirmed influenza are higher than expected for this time of year. According to CDC, laboratory-confirmed influenza hospitalization rates for children 5-17 years old and for adults 18-49 years old exceed average flu season rates.
- The predominant influenza virus circulating is the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (formerly called swine flu). This influenza virus remains susceptible to antiviral drugs (oseltamivir and zanamivir) with rare exception.
- In contrast to seasonal flu strains, adults older than 64 years have been less affected by the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus thus far.

Influenza Illness

Symptoms caused by the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus are similar to other seasonal flu viruses and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills, and fatigue. Some people report vomiting and/or diarrhea.

- Most people who get influenza recover without any treatment or special care.
- However, influenza can cause serious illness in some people. Persons at higher risk of complications from influenza viruses include children younger than five years old, pregnant women, people with certain health conditions, and persons older than 65 years.
- Children and adults who develop a fever of at least 100°F and a cough or sore throat should call their doctor, especially if they are at higher risk of complications from influenza.
- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in the body. The CDC currently recommends that clinicians prioritize use of antivirals for persons at higher risk of complications from influenza.

Prevention

CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting the flu: vaccination, everyday preventive actions including frequent hand washing and staying home when sick, and the correct use of antiviral drugs *if* your doctor recommends them.

Vaccines are the most effective measure for preventing influenza. Vaccines are available to protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu.

- There are two forms of the vaccine: a shot and a nasal spray.
- One dose of vaccine is needed for persons ten and older. Two doses are needed for children 9 years old and younger.
- The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccines are made just like seasonal flu vaccines. They are expected to be as safe and effective as seasonal flu vaccines.
- The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccines will not prevent seasonal flu. Persons need to get the seasonal flu vaccine to be protected against the seasonal flu strains, which are also expected to circulate this flu season.

The 2009 H1N1 Influenza vaccine is being released over the next several weeks.

- A very small shipment of the nasal spray vaccine will be arriving in Virginia this week. The purpose of this first shipment is to test vaccine distribution systems. Most of this vaccine was sent to hospitals to begin vaccination of healthcare workers.
- Larger shipments of both the flu shot and the nasal spray flu vaccine are expected to be released over the next several weeks. Vaccine will be offered by many private providers as well at special health department clinics.
- The health department has tentative plans in place to begin offering this vaccine to school children at school-based clinics in most of the school divisions beginning the week of October 19 and continuing through November.

Basic measures can help reduce the spread of germs.

- Flu viruses spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing.
- When you are sick with the flu, stay at home or away from others until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever (100° F), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw your used tissues in the trash can.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleanser often, especially when sick.